

Mr. Ford's Page

IT WOULD be a beneficial act if someone could get it noised among the people that there is to be no change in the Government of the United States this year or next, but only a change in its administration. One would almost be led to think, by some of the statements that are being issued and some of the promises that are being made, that a most revolutionary change is coming and that the country is to swing off on a path entirely new and untried before.

The Old Ship of State is going to run as usual, but there will be a new First Mate. And he will not be able to upset the winds, nor reverse the ocean currents, nor change the position of the stars—the best he can do will be to make things shipshape and steer a safe course.

The Government is not going to change, but only some of the chief men on duty there.

The Government of the United States is an established institution; it might be just as well to have that understood. The Government, in its personnel, is not the United States by any means; it is only a committee of citizens, so to speak, who have been selected to look after the public affairs of the citizens of the United States.

The affairs which they shall handle and the manner in which they shall handle them are all set forth in the Constitution of the United States. While we are about it, it might be just as well if it were very clearly known that underneath the Government of the United States is the Constitution of the United States, and underneath the Constitution is the great mass of 105 million Americans.

The Constitution of the United States is written on paper. It was written a long time ago. The original copy is kept under lock and key at Washington. But even if that copy were destroyed, the Constitution would not be lost, because it is written upon the heart and mind of the people who compose our nation.

The Constitution was not handed down from heaven and no one has ever said it was a complete and perfect instrument, although there is none nearer perfect in the world. It has this in its favor, however, that under its provisions there has developed on this continent a type of national life of which none need be ashamed, for which none need be apologetic.

This paper is a social contract to which you and 105,000,000 other persons agree for the purpose of regulating our lives together. We agree on our rights, we agree on our duties, we write our agreement down, we appoint men with certain powers to become custodians of the agreement to see that its terms are observed and to perform other duties with reference to all of us; and there you have the Government, based on the Constitution.

Several times in the more than fourteen decades since the Constitution was first written, it has been changed, not, however, to undo anything it had done, but to do something it did not foresee. That is, the details of the Constitution have been somewhat enlarged; the spirit of it has not been changed.

Within the Constitution itself are described the methods by which it may be amended. It is one of the marks of the nobility of this document that it has, as it were, an open side looking toward progress. Its makers did not regard it as a fence, but as a foundation.

So, whenever anyone feels that there is a defect that goes deeper than government administration he is free to suggest an amendment of the Constitution, and if he can get a sufficient number of states to agree, the amendment will be made.

But there are certain changes advocated today which never could be made because to do so would be to destroy the principle of the Constitution itself. It goes without saying that if anyone should propose an amendment which would destroy a man's right in what

his labor has produced, and if such an amendment should be made, something more would be done than merely to add another article to the Constitution. The very spirit of the instrument would be wounded and killed.

There are some things which could never become constitutional though you wrote them into the Constitution a thousand times and confirmed them by a thousand ratifications of all the states. The reason is that they are not in the constitution of justice.

So, while the people are indeed supreme over the written Constitution, the spiritual constitution is supreme over them. The French Revolutionists wrote constitutions too—every drunken writer among them tossed off a constitution. Where are they? All vanished. Why? Because they were not in harmony with the constitution of the universe. The power of the Constitution is not

dependent on any Government, but on its inherent rightness and practicability. The power of the Government, however, is entirely dependent on the Constitution, and because that parchment says certain things about elections, the administration of the Government is this year being put before the people for a new selection.

The administration of government is so vitally connected with the people's welfare that it is amazing to see how really little initiative interest they take in the selection of the administrators.

No one will deny the statement that there is more interest being shown in the Government today by the would-be administrators than by the people in whose interest the Government is to be administered.

There are, of course, several reasons for that. One is that the people know that whichever old party is appointed by the people's vote to the administration of the Government, the difference will not be noticeable. But perhaps the strongest reason is that the desire of the would-be administrators to get into the office is greater than the desire of the people to put any of them in. That is to say, the election now approaching is like many another in that respect: those who are seeking office have made up their mind as to what they want, with far more decision and ardor than the people have made up their mind as to whom they want.

The people are caught between two currents. One current drives heavily in favor of the idea of government as an aid to the people in all their interests. "The Government can do it," is its keynote. This is true—however much it may be overdone, it is true. Why should it not

be true that the people acting collectively—that is, through the Government—should not be able to accomplish whatever they wish?

Well, then, this faith in the Government is built up. And then another current sets in—an administration is put into office which, through incompetency or dishonesty, absolutely disappoints the expectation of the people. Then follows that sinister propaganda which spreads distrust of all government and suspicion of all administrations.

This nation is founded on the Constitution, and the Constitution provides for the Government, but if the Administration fails to administer the Government for the people for whom it was set up by the Constitution, then it is serving the dark forces which work to undermine all confidence in the idea of government.

The people should be aroused to the truth that, if the Administration does not serve them, it is not the fault of government, and that if they wish the Government to serve them they must themselves make the choice of those who administer it.

Election time—good old Constitution-protected election time—puts the whole matter directly into the people's hands. Conventions have nothing to do with it. Parties have nothing to do with it. The people may have it all their own way, to put in whom they will.

WE HAVE a good Government. That does not necessarily mean that it is always well administered. The best government may be badly administered and so fail to serve the people up to the measure of its ability. The remedy is not to change the Government, unless it can be shown that it is bad, but to change the type of men who are chosen to administer the Government. An election is coming on, but it will not affect the Government at all. It will only replace the men who now administer the Government. Let us all understand that the basic Constitution and the Government founded upon it are firmly established and secure. But let us see that the Constitution and the Government are honestly and ably administered by the citizens who will be appointed to that work at the coming election.